

Our First 100 Days

By Council President Scott Peters, First District

On January 1st, the City of San Diego launched a five-year experiment in civic government. After decades of a manager-council form of leadership, voters approved a mayor-council system which would provide checks and balances, much like our federal government. The mayor would be given executive oversight of all city departments, and the council would become the city's legislative body.

While voters will ultimately decide whether this transition is successful and should be made permanent, I'm pleased with how smoothly the change was made and the progress we've made thus far. Mayor Sanders has effortlessly segued into his new role, and the council is benefiting from the input of the new Independent Budget Analyst and her staff.

When I was elected by my council colleagues to be the city's first council president, I vowed that my work on citywide issues would not push district projects and concerns to the margins. I'm pleased and proud that we have been able to make great progress on projects in the First District as well as working on initiatives that benefit all San Diegans.

Upon taking office as council president, I laid out a series of goals to get beyond the lawyering and finger-pointing of the past and move the city into a brighter future. These include protecting our families and children; improving our parks, trails, beaches and bays; enhancing our neighborhoods; funding streets, sidewalks and street lights; serving our older communities and making a City Council that's responsive to taxpayers.

In our first 100 days, the council has been able to make progress on each of these goals. We are working to improve police and fire response time in our communities and site a new fire station in Carmel Valley. We're working to reduce litter and the risk of fire in our open space parks and beaches, complete much-needed road improvements and connections, and find ways to maximize state and federal dollars to maintain and enhance our neighborhoods.

The improvements we've made which I'm most proud of are in creating a responsive and transparent City Council. Earlier this year the council voted to change the order of business at council meetings to make it easier for citizens to attend and speak. Non-agenda public comment and city proclamations and resolutions are now done on Tuesday mornings, leaving Monday and Tuesday afternoons to focus entirely on city business items. We're also announcing specific times for high-profile issues that attract lots of public interest. These changes are making our meetings faster and more efficient, as well as making the process easier to navigate for residents.

Another way we're working to include the public is through our city budget process. The council consolidated its budget hearings into three full days – rather than a few hours per week for eight weeks -- with specific times listed for discussion of libraries, parks and public safety. I'm encouraged that the mayor has placed a priority on neighborhood services, and has recommended budget increases for parks and street resurfacing.

Finally, we've created a new Elections Task Force, which gives citizens a voice in our elections process. Nine citizens have been appointed to work with the City Clerk over the next two years to research elections topics and make recommendations to the council.

Although much work remains to be done, I'm confident that by working together, the mayor and council can restore the good name and finances of our city, and lay the groundwork for the future.